



Office of the Police and
Crime Commissioner
STAFFORDSHIRE

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are you doing this... what's the point?

In the last few years, crime has changed. It's more complex because of technology and it's more international because of the internet. It means that whilst policing must still deal with burglary or antisocial behaviour and more, it must also adapt the way it works, day-to-day and strategically, to tackle new threats and keep us all safe.

The work of the fire service has also changed with fewer fires but new types of harm the service has developed the expertise and specialisms to deal with. The two services could, in future, work closer together to deliver their specific and their joint responsibilities more effectively. It would also mean more joint investment and joined up strategies to meet growing complexity and evolving threats.

Is this about more cuts?

Not exactly! There is less money but what is there could definitely still be spent better. Spending more of the money available on frontline policing and frontline fire services with a stronger focus on preventing harm before it happens is entirely possible. Part of that is freeing up extra investment for frontline delivery by combining the admin and support functions, such as HR, ICT and Finance, each emergency service currently has, into one function that supports both.

An independent assessment looked at all of this in Staffordshire and the report identified numerous opportunities to provide better value for the public and make people safer through the two services working together in a more organised way. It also found both services would be more financially secure, providing certainty and stability for the future with at least £3.6million extra each year being available for frontline delivery of both services.

What difference will the public see?

Very little with what each service does on an everyday basis. More policing in communities, the fire service being more visible and widening their expertise around safety and the prevention of harm while working in a more collaborative way with the police. I'd also expect to see more buildings having both fire and police in them so more of the money can be spent on frontline operations for both services in local areas across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

What will happen in the future?

If we make this change to governance it will help both services spend money in a better way so more can be spent on the services we see on our streets. I'm confident it will make frontline cuts less likely because it will mean more secure finances and should reduce the need for yet more big changes.

In short I want cops and firefighters to get on with their jobs with more resources available, without the shadow of more and more and more upheaval for years to come. That's my plan.

This consultation is about governance... why does it matter?

This is a bit dry if I'm honest! But it's important because the governance of a public service, in effect, is the big decision making about the way it works. It is also about overseeing what they do and how they do it... holding professionals to account on behalf of you, me and everyone else in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. If there are different governing bodies overseeing each of the services it makes it much more difficult to achieve what is needed. The independent report concludes the governance change is important.

Why will changing governance help services on the ground?

At the moment, 21 councillors from Stoke-on-Trent City and Staffordshire County Councils govern the fire service on a part time basis. They sit on something called the Fire and Rescue Authority which pays an annual allowance to all councillors.

Policing was governed in a similar way until 2013 when elected Police and Crime Commissioners took over responsibility. There is strong evidence elected PCCs have worked well so the Government has asked each Commissioner to consider bringing the governance of the Fire and Rescue Service in their area alongside that of policing governance.

Over the last year, the independent report about doing that in Staffordshire has been developed. Its findings are that bringing fire governance alongside policing, under the PCC, would improve the way the two services work together, speed up delivery of fresh ideas, be better value for public money and improve public accountability in the way it has done for policing. It would also save £2million over ten years on the current costs of councillor governance of fire.

Will there be job losses in the services?

Yes there would be some. Part of providing more money to frontline police and fire services for our communities would be bringing the two very similar admin and support functions each emergency service currently has, just a few miles apart, into one combined function both would use. This would be done carefully and compassionately in an agreed way.

What does it mean for council tax we pay towards police and fire locally?

As Police and Crime Commissioner I froze the amount we all pay locally towards policing for my first four years in Office. I was sure we could spend money better and promised I wouldn't ask local people for more until I was satisfied we were spending what we'd already got more efficiently.

Because of the current challenges faced around terrorism and new types of crime I did increase the part of the council tax people pay for policing in 2017 to provide extra funding for the capabilities police need in extreme, but unlikely, situations.

I'm not yet in a position to make any promises on the council tax which goes to fire but my instinct is to spend what's there better before asking you, me and everyone else to pay more.

How can fire officers do a police job and police do a fire job?

They shouldn't and won't. Yes, they can work better together but police will fight crime and fire fighters will fight fires. Their specialisms are vital and must be maintained but they can do many things in a more coordinated way.

Will all this save or cost money?

It is likely that some more savings will be needed by the Government. Doing what I am suggesting will minimise the impact on local services and will allow room for investment. At least £3.6million more each year will be available to front line services by doing what I am suggesting, including £200k annually on the current cost of fire service oversight and governance by councillors.

What do the people in the services think of this?

It's mixed. People are naturally suspicious about any change, most of us are. In reality, changing the governance so the two services work better together and are sustainable for the future should allow people to get on with their jobs with more certainty than they've had for a long time.

My strong sense from the police service is one of being positive about PCC governance... but of course they'll be different views. I'm consulting widely and it's important all have the opportunity to make their views known.

Will this affect pay or Terms & Conditions for people who work in each service?

Policing 'regs' as they are called are set nationally not locally for police officers. Fire officers Ts&Cs are also agreed nationally and I will NOT change that. Police and fire staff Ts&Cs are pretty similar and I would hope to work with unions and staff to tidy up any differences to make administering things easier. I do NOT foresee any fundamental or material changes.

Why aren't you doing the bigger change to single employer the report outlines?

This option would mean one Chief Officer running fire and police. Whilst the evidence suggests even more opportunities for efficiencies and better joint working I believe it is right to have a professional fire officer being responsible for the fire service and a professional police officer running the police service.... but working more closely together than ever before. I don't want to mix roles in that way.

Has this been done before?

The governance arrangements of PCCs for police services have worked well. Doing the same for the fire service here should be straightforward and provide new opportunities as well as freeing up investment for both services. There are eight PCCs who are looking at doing this currently.

Who is/will the PCC be responsible to?

I am responsible to everyone in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent whether they voted for me or not and every 3 months I appear for several hours before councillors from across the whole area on something called the Police and Crime Panel. It's a bit like a Select Committee in Parliament and they grill me on every aspect of everything I am doing on behalf of the public. The Law would require that panel to expand to cover work with the fire service too.

Since 2013 I have spoken at more than 400 public events and meetings and been face to face with over 20,000 people explaining where things are, and will be, in policing and criminal justice.

The media, national and local, are no strangers to the PCC office and provide scrutiny by the press and expert organisations. Contact from members of the public to my office are nearly 100 times more each week than the old Police Authority which was similar to the current Fire Authority.

National research suggests the accountability to the public the PCC role has brought to policing is effective and I have every reason to believe it would be as effective for fire governance.

Who makes the decision?

The 150 page independently developed business case will go to the Home Office. It will be assessed by approved experts and the Home Secretary will agree or not agree with our proposals.